

THE TREASURES OF VILLA ARCONATI-FAR

#4 – l'Ala delle Signore

Waiting to open wide the doors of our little Versailles to welcome again the visitors who love it so much, we take this opportunity to let you know better the "treasures" that Villa Arconati-FAR guards and that few still know.

Perhaps not everyone knows that Villa Arconati-FAR is so large that it can afford an entire wing dedicated to its ladies. Since the palace took on its current architectural aspect in the mid-eighteenth century, it has consisted of 70 rooms only in the "noble" part - with 365 windows according to a local legend - and almost 10,000 square meters of surface. A real "palace", ready to host the flower of the Milanese aristocracy and beyond!

In the small Versailles, as the Villa was defined in the Grand Tour guides, each room was expressly dedicated to communicating the grandeur, refinement and prestige of the Arconati.

Dedicating space to the ladies and their most intimate and private needs was part of this project.

THE FAMILY GALLERY

The wing of the ladies is located on the main floor, in the north-west wing and opens with two rooms that housed the Arconati Gallery: the portraits of the most illustrious ancestors, among which some Arconati ladies also appeared.

Countess Maria, daughter of Galeazzo Arconati, who first inherited Castellazzo on the death of her father. The estate was not inherited by her husband, as it should have been, since a particular clause was put forward in the will: Castellazzo had been purchased with the dowry of Maria's mother, Anna de Capitaneis de Arconate - Galeazzo's wife, therefore everything would be went as a dowry to his daughter.

Then there were the portraits of the sisters Rosa and Livia Arconati, both nuns. Their portraits, which were auctioned a few years ago at the Dorotheum in Vienna, are remembered for the skill with which they were made, especially in the elegance and refinement of the drapery of the clothes.



Portrait of Rosa (on the left) and Livia Arconati

Some of the Arconati nuns lived in the convent of Santa Marta in Milan and were certainly important also for the fate of the family's collecting: in fact, in the convent, the funeral monument was kept - never finished - at Gaston de Foix made by Agostino Busti said the Bambaja, of which the Arconati were the greatest collectors in the world.

The main fragments of the monument, in fact, arrived in Castellazzo between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and remained in the collections of the Villa until the nineties, when they were purchased from the Castello Sforzesco in Milan.

THE GALLERY AND THE FAMILY CHAPEL

Continuing beyond the rooms dedicated to portraits, you enter the Gallery of paintings. Here was the main collection of works of art on canvas: portraits smaller than those exhibited in previous rooms, landscapes, mythological and religious scenes.

The Gallery of Paintings is located right above the Gipsoteca, which, on the ground floor, instead housed the collection of classical statues, including a copy of the Venus de 'Medici.

Right at the entrance to the Gallery is the Arconati private chapel, where - it is said - the noblewomen began their days with a prayer to the Virgin, painted with great skill with the trompe l'oeil technique, so as to seem a three-dimensional figurine and not just a painting.

Having a private chapel on the first floor of your Villa was certainly not for everyone! Already in the sixteenth century, in fact, San Carlo Borromeo had established that anyone who wanted a private chapel at his noble residence, would first build one open to the people on the ground floor.

The Arconati certainly must have thought that they would never divide the rooms of their Villa with the population of the village, therefore they found a small trick to this "unexpected": right next to the Villa stands the medieval church dedicated to San Guglielmo. Well, the Arconati declared that this was their chapel for the people - taking on the responsibility of taking care of it - thus being able to build and bless an exclusive private chapel on the main floor, where in 1629 the wedding of Maria Arconati was celebrated. And to marry the granddaughter came nothing less than Archbishop Federico Borromeo himself!



The Gallery in a vintage image of the late nineteenth

THE ALCOVE

To be honest we must say that the Wing of the Ladies of the Villa includes only a few rooms dedicated exclusively to ladies: these are private rooms, including a wardrobe and a room where women ate when they did not have to participate in social occasions.

All the rooms we have talked about so far were environments used mainly by ladies, but certainly not precluded to noblemen.

This was certainly not the case with the room immediately adjacent to the Gallery, which is the alcove on the main floor.

The alcoves were a type of bedroom present in every noble residence and were characterized by the fact that they were often obtained in a sheltered portion within a wider environment, from which they were separated by curtains or curtains.

What characterized the alcoves the most was their use: they were, in fact, rooms devoted to carnal love and sexual pleasure.

The pictorial decoration of the room underlines the fact that this room was the only one of the whole wing used during the night: the marvelous broken down perspective reveals, in fact, a starry sky in which a male figure hovers holding a stylus and a cornucopia from which smoke comes out. It is Hypnos, the god of sleep, who with his magic rod touches the eyelids of men, while he pours on them a soporific fluid that makes them fall asleep gently



Painted ceiling of the alcove with the representation of Hypnos

THE ROOM OF POETRY

The last room dedicated to the Arconati ladies is a day sitting area where engravings with eighteenth-century portraits and landscapes were once hung. Here the ladies spent time with the most daily tasks such as embroidery, singing, music or reading. It was certainly an intimate environment, where the ladies could also exchange confidences and gossip!

This is the environment that most of all in the Villa speaks "female", in fact the faces of the great women of classical antiquity are painted: young and handsome women, but also old and thoughtful, who look at each other and seem to remind us that the love of the Arconati for classical art is also found in their ladies.